



Animal husbandry

STEPHANIE HOUSLEY AND CO. CREATE THE CORAL AND TUSK CREATURES



Did you teach yourself how to draw and have you studied art?

I've drawn my whole life. I'm fortunate that it comes naturally and that I love doing it. Some of my earliest memories of drawing were with my dad. He would begin a drawing, then pass it to me for 'phase two', we'd pass it back and forth until we were satisfied. My mom also cultivated my creative side by working on projects with me and enrolling me in summer art classes. I attended a public suburban high school and then my last year switched to the School for Creative and Performing Arts in downtown Cincinnati which changed the course of my life. I had amazing teachers there, Ms Hofmann in particular, who introduced the concept of being an artist and attending art college for further studies. I applied to Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) three days before the deadline, much to my surprise and amazement I was accepted – and with a generous scholarship. RISD made everything else possible. Every day I feel lucky to have studied there.

Did you explore any other art disciplines before settling into textiles?

Yes! I went to college thinking I would study glass. I had an apprenticeship making stained glass windows, so the first year I took glass blowing during winter session but it felt too limited as a medium. Next I considered furniture design since I wanted to combine art and functionality – that lasted a semester. Then I found textiles and it was a perfect fit!

Where do you find your inspiration?

Oh, everywhere. Seeing the phenomenal Alexander McQueen show at the Met, taking a walk on the beach and the way the air feels, watching a funny squirrel in



the park, an article in the New Yorker, living in this city of endless opportunity... I'm inspired when I travel, which I am lucky to do frequently. Nature and animals are my favourite subjects and I like to focus on character and story telling.

Where do you work and what do you listen to while you work?

I work in a few different places; I spread out on a long work table with my computer and embroidery machine, but there's another nice sunny desk in our front room. But my best thinking and drawing happens on the subway. It's totally magic. Musically, lately I've been listening to Jeff Bridges, Gillian Welch, Otis Redding, Motown, Charles Bradley – I balance that with a little Black Sabbath and some hip hop.

Did you have a favourite toy as a child and was it hand crafted?

I ran an egalitarian setup with my toys, objects and stuffed animals. I went through long phases with each as my favourite. Almost everything I had was handmade; often projects I would make with my Grammy out of orphaned socks and tattered textiles. Although my work looks different there are themes that carry over from that time such as tooth fairy pillows and pockets (I asked my mom to sew pockets into everything I owned) and my colour direction is informed by my childhood things.

What is your favourite fairy tale?

I'm not sure that this even is one, but I have to choose Robin Hood – such terrific characters, excellent morals and principles.

What is your favourite animal?

Now that is an impossible question. Of the animals I know, I have to go with our dog, Paco, since I'm bananas about him. I have a special love for nautical, woodland and





prairie animals – which I admire from afar.

Is there anything you enjoy painting the most?

What I enjoy most is drawing animals then developing their character and making up their stories and personalities!

Are there any particular designers, artists or illustrators that you admire?

Yes so many: Maira Kalman (I recently saw the show here in NY which was amazing), Marcel Dzama, Charlie Harper, Wes Anderson, Walton Ford, Sheila Hicks, Josef Frank, John Derian, Gary Graham...I could go on and on!!!

Is there a particular era you identify with?

No, my mind doesn't really work like that. I'm an 'in the present' kind of gal.

Do you ever collaborate with others on projects?

Not with other designers to create a product. It's a nice idea if you can get the balance right. I constantly collaborate with an amazing team to accomplish all that we do, in particular Alija who works with me and is a true godsend.

Do you have any projects or new products planned?

Yes of course! I'm just starting to make some mental space to conceptualize the new collection which will debut in January. The pocket dolls are brand new this season and so far they have been received really well. I'm planning the next round now. It's a learning process everyday and fun to see how our products are perceived. We take note of popular things but with new products it's more of a 'lightbulb' approach – we're struck by an idea, get excited and then make it!



If you weren't a designer, what would you like to be?

I'd really love to be able to work with animal rescue and recovery.

What is it like working with your partner (Chris Lacinak)?

We always joke that we are exceptionally close as a couple but don't work well together... but we really do! We are different in our behaviour, personality and approach to business but we capitalize on that: I absolutely could not have done it without him. Chris is the brains behind the business and he's also my best critic. He has a great eye, sense of humor and excellent ideas.

What makes your company special?

I think that a large part of what makes us special is that we take a well known technique and make it our own. People are captivated by the drawings, some find them really funny, they make some people genuinely laugh, hard and out loud... anything that can incite that reaction is special.

Many people sew as a hobby, what do you do when you're not working?

I love to be outside. Bike rides are top of my list, riding around the park and then down to the Statue of Liberty. My favourite place is the beach. That's where I'm happiest. My husband and I drive out to Robert Moses beach on Long Island or Fire Island. I'm blessed with a community of friends that are like family. I love to spend time with them just hanging out, cooking and chatting. ...

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